

Some Observations on Children of the First Period of the National School

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Some Observations on Children of the First Period of the National School

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I. Introduction

With regard to children, in the new system of national school in our country, the whole of the educational courses are divided into four periods, based upon the stage of development of the children, as follows : (1) The first and the second school years are called the first period, (2) the third year, the second period and (3) the fourth, the fifth and the sixth years are the third period. (These six years constitute the elementary course.) (4) The first and the second years of the higher course are the fourth period.

I was in charge of a first year class of the elementary course last year, and now I am continuously in charge of a second year class of the same pupils. During these one and a half years, I noted my occasional observations about children of my class, and made some extracts from their compositions and their illustrated diaries, for the purpose of obtaining concrete material concerning the development of child mind. I have now about fifty items of such material. They are not, however, the result of objective observations in a scientific meaning. They have rather the nature of miscellaneous notes to be utilized for the performance of my duty as a teacher. Consequently they may lack the organized strictness needed in connection with such a material. But, on the other hand, they are the result of occasional observations, and the observations of children as pupils of a class,

not as individual children; so there may be some unexpected collection of interesting facts, and the situation of the class as a whole may be depicted pretty well.

Now, selecting seven topics from this various material, I will consider particularly the indifferntiated mental state of the children of the first period.

The seven topics are as follows :

School-year	Term	Month	No. of Case	Subject of Case	Method of Collection	Names of children who appeared in case and their resp. age at that time
First year of elementary course	I	Apr.	(1)	Mt. Huzi and Norakuro	Observation in the class-room	Hisao (6 ; 4), Eihiko (6 ; 3), Akio (6 ; 11) and six or seven other boys
	II	Sept.	(2)	Pond and pool	Observations at school-ground and swimmingpool	Bun-iti (6 ; 7) and many other boys
	III	Jan.	(3)	“When we go to a sea-front . . .”	Composition of a pupil	Honda (7 ; 8), Takayama (7 ; 0), Inamura (7 ; 2), Sudo (7 ; 3), Ando (7 ; 3) and Saito (6 ; 9)
		Feb.	(4)	An old castle	Observation at suburbs and composition of a pupil	Akio (7 ; 7) and all the other boys of the class
		March	(5)	To hold another's nose	Observation in the class-room	Hisao (7 ; 2), Yasuo (7 ; 2) and all the other boys of the class
Second y. of e. c.	I	Apr.	(6)	Thermometer	Observation in the class-room	Takeo (7 ; 7) and about ten other boys
	II	Sept.	(7)	Motor-car	Observation in the class-room	Hiroshi (7 ; 10) and many other boys of the class

II. Description of Cases

(1) Mt. Huzi and Norakuro¹

This was an occurrence in our class-room. There is a black-board at the backside of this room, of which our pupils have the free use, and about ten boys were gathering now before it.

¹ The hero in a serial caricature sketched by S. Tagawa, a Japanese caricaturist, who is especially in favour among children.

The schoolwork had not begun yet. Two boys among them were drawing each pictures with chalk on the board. Hisao was sketching Mt. Huzi, and Akio a submarine. The graceful figure of Mt. Huzi, with its wide base, was soon traced. And then Eihiko began to draw the Norakuro, which was his favourite subject. At this moment, there happened an accident. For the tail of the Norakuro touched the base-line of the Mt. Huzi, and Hisao felt that it spoiled the magnificence of Mt. Huzi. There was a violent quarrel among them. And the result was that each picture were covered with their scribbles.

(2) Pond and Pool

All the children entered recklessly the pond of muddy water. At first, they were nervous about their pants becoming dirty. However a great confusion prevailed among them, when mud-fishes began to move here and there in the pond. And in the next moment, there were boys sitting with their legs crossed and others lying themselves down flat in the pond. It was just like a war.

After a while the sun was obscured and the sky was covered with clouds. It was likely to rain. Then the boys came out of the pond, and there I found a procession of muddy figures. Being perplexed by this state of things, I ordered them to remove roughly the mud first at a foot-washing-place, and then to wash their whole body by a shower. I intended, after that, to lead them into the swimming pool for the finish. It seemed to me that this finishing plan must please them. Bun-iti, however, was sobbing on my announcement of the plan. I asked. "What is the matter with you?" He answered. "Sir, I can't enter the pool." "Why, not?" "My mother told me this morning that I must stay away from swimming to-day, for I have a cold now." Oh! This was the appeal of Bun-iti, the muddy and stark-naked boy.

(3) "When we go to a sea-front. . . ."²

About six o'clock in the morning on January 31st., Suto,

² An old tanka, a 31-syllable Japanese poem, composed by Yakamoti Otomo. Recently it has been set to music as a song for national ceremonies and such kinds of meeting, for example, the farewell meeting of soldiers who depart for the front.

Takayama and Inamura came to my home. Suto said. "Mr. Takayama's father has gone to the front, as you know. So we want to go to pray for his success in war." I asked. "To which shrine do we go?" Then Ando answered. "Let us visit the Matuo shrine." But, after saying so, he continued. "As there is Mr. Saito with us, so we shall do better to visit the Tōsyōgu shrine." And then we visited the Tōsyōgu shrine and prayed for Mr. Takayama's father for his success in war. After the prayer, I proposed to sing together the song: "When we go to a sea-front....." Inamura said. "Let us sing it together." And we sang the song "When we go to a sea-front....." together and returned home.

(4) An old castle

.....

"Sir, I think that a soldier would climb up that stone-wall."

"Well, I can't tell."

"A soldier can climb up, I am sure."

"I also can!"

"Well?"

"Will you allow us to climb up the stone-wall?"

"If you will, you may do so."

This allowance caused a serious matter. The children, grasping the withered ivies and roots of grass tufts, endeavoured to climb up the stone-wall with all their might. But they hardly scaled thirty metres high at best. I gave a word of command "Stop!" when I supposed it to be just time.

But the next day Akio wrote a composition as follows:

..... We went further. Soon we came to a high castle-wall. All of us tried to climb up the castle-wall. And I might have climbed up just halfway to the top, if I had held out a little more. Yamada has climbed up highest among us.

(5) To hold another's nose

After lunch I was reading the illustrated diaries at the desk. A little later I ordered the children to prepare to return home. I felt that they were to-day wonderfully calm and taking advantage of their being quiet I continued to correct carefully the

illustrated diaries. But in the meantime, the children began crying, and it became more and more noisy. At that time it happened that Hideo, leaving his own place, began canvassing. All other children were also crying with a loud voice in a very good humour. On the other hand the eloquence of gay-spirited Hisao turned unconsciously to abusing and deriding, for none of the boys accepted the challenge of the eloquent speaker. Wondering at the quietness of the children, I laid down the pen. Though the noisy atmosphere became suddenly calm when I ordered two or three children to give back the illustrated diaries, Hisao, a tyrant, could not recover his consciousness yet. "Hisao!" I tried to raise my voice a little more. But I could not receive any answer from him as I expected. He began crying aloud, without consciousness that he was called. Other children could not repress their smiling. Then suddenly this tyrant, who may have become aware of my call by this situation came to me with a rude step. While none of the others had put their knapsacks on their backs, he alone had been already fully prepared for returning. New laughter burst out again. Losing more his composure, he reached out his hand, grasped tightly and tried to take the illustrated diary from my hand. I did nothing but receive coldly such bad manners. Hisao, who could not succeed with his hand reached out went back to his place in a queer, unsteady pose, and so caused again a new bursting laughter. This tyrant, who could not discriminate one from another, shook his fist to everyone, glaring at their faces like a drunkard. But no one cared for him. All was more useless for him than beating the air. As soon as he leaned against his own desk unsteadily, he cast his own body on that of Yasuo, who was sitting before him and kept down Yasuo's head.

Yasuo threw to me a glance with a meaning look and even showed a forced smile. And then, to my surprise, the other seized Yasuo's nose all of a sudden. Yasuo and I were highly surprised by this queer behaviour.

(6) Thermometer

Spring has come. The children, who felt released from the cold, became to be interested specially in the thermometer. After the first class work was over, the children went out from the

schoolroom. Nevertheless, one group merrily made some noise about the thermometer. I saw this view: the children brought their mouths near the head of the thermometer, puffed up their cheeks and blew upon it in turns. Because I watched them in silence, as it was even interesting to me, they seemed not to stop easily. When I looked again a while after I ordered them to go out of the room at once for preparation of the next lesson, Takeo was continuing eagerly his blowing. I called him. "Oh! You must not blow so upon the thermometer!" He answered. "Sir! I don't blow upon it." Surely I found him breathing in, pursing up his lips and contracting his cheeks. "What will you do by your breathing in?" "I want to lower the thermometer as they have raised it." "Then, did the thermometer go down?" "No, it did not." After this answer, Takeo bobbed and went out from the class room.

(7) Motor-car

Hirosi was appointed to read a chapter of "Training of Speaking", a kind of secondary reader of our language. The sentences of this reader were constructed from narrative parts of the Yomikata, the reader of the national language, omitting the descriptive parts of it. The text follows:

23. Motor-car

"What is it?"

"What is the matter with you?"

"A hitch of the motor-car."

"What kind of a hitch is it?"

"Please look at the rear wheel of the left side."

"Has it broken?"

"In the tyre of the wheel there has been made a hole and the air has gone out."

"..... I am sorry to have kept you waiting. Please get on!"

"Oh! Many thanks for your trouble!"

"Buru buru....."

"Good bye!"

"Good bye!"

"Bubbu....."

When he had done with the chapter, I asked. "Hiroshi! You have done very well. Now, tell me who are speaking in these sentences?"

"Sir! Those who are speaking are I³, Masao, a strange gentle man, the chauffeur and the motor-car."

"Ah! Well, is the answer of Hiroshi right?" I asked all the children. "Yes!" They answered, all raising their hands without any objection. I asked once more an other child, who and who were conversing. But I received the same answer. Then I asked: "Does the moter-car speak also?" They showed in their appearance to be abashed, as if they found their mistake only now.

Consideration.

Through all the examples we can find the mentality of undifferentiation between subject and circumstances. It shows a various appearance: egocentricity, namely the impossibility of taking another's standpoint, and this presents the children from being able, to use the one black-board in concert, and opens such a fierce quarrel, as if their own possession were infringed, their honour damaged, or the accomplishment of their serious tasks disturbed, for instance when Norakuro and Mt. Huzi come by chance to be entangled; it exhibits such contradiction, as a child showed, who refused positively to go into the pool obeying to his mother's prohibition and did not agree with taking away the mud, while on the other hand he had dared bravely to jump into the pond of muddy water to catch the loaches (2); it further reveals the subjective way of thinking, where one takes it for granted, that one can lower the temeperature of the thermometer by breathing in (6); the physiognomic perception, where one takes the onomatopoetic sound "buru buru....." "bubbū....." etc. for a conversation, which can be compared with the greetings "many thanks for your trouble." "good-bye" (7). I think that all these are phenomena, which are peculiar to the children of the first period.

It is a serious and an interesting problem, to trace the

³ It is not the first person of Hiroshi, but the child, whom we can take for the writer of the concerned sentence.

transition of the above mentioned characteristic from the first to the second year. But we cannot hasten to get to a conclusion from this scanty material. We can guess only as follows: The change of children is never noticeable, for Hisao in example (5) plays up as usual such an undifferentiation as to hold Yasuo's nose in spite of his second appearance after one full year from case (1). Secondly we suppose, that the undifferentiation between subject and object has however an appreciable stability about the end of the first year or at the beginning of the second year because the attitude of the children of a class has so much composure in March of the first year, that they could permit Hisao's tyrannical behaviour and even observe it somewhat coldly and this the more so, because Yasuo in his attitude did not get beside himself by the excitement, and he could keep the class order even with a forced smile, while his head was kept down and his nose was held. Finally we want to attract a little the attention to the fact, that the eager interest and positive action upon circumstances, like those seen in case (6) of Takeo, began to appear more frequently, when they became second year boys.

These are our observation in a longitudinal section. Now let us confront the cases (3), (4), and (5) and consider the third term of the first year in a transverse section.

The attitude, to think with admiration of prosperous affairs in bygone age and to compare it emotionally with the lonesome present state, when facing the stone wall of an old castle, is of course difficult for the mentality of first period children. They live much in the so present time world, that it is difficult for them to wait calmly even so little time as less than ten minutes. "Wait calmly!" This is quite a painful subject for children in this period. For them, who cannot feel any poetical sentiment towards the stone wall of the old castle, it towers high only as the object, which incites them to a behaviour.

Then their judgment is so indistinct as to the limit of the possibility of their action, that they run rashly towards their aim driven by a bold conviction, when their interest has been awakened. They do not, so to say, know their station in life. They are "fools, who rush where angels fear to tread." The following fact results from the same ground: They take interest in gliders, which ought to fit the fifth or sixth year boys, and struggle with one another for their collection and such collection extends rapidly

between friends.

Their behaviour is exposed to many dangers, for instance to follow blind by the majority or to be dragged by the "force of field" from that undifferentiation between subject and circumstances. We can place the children in case (4), who challenged the stone wall together with those of the former instance, and Hisao in (5) with those of the latter instance. And the description in Hisao's composition, "I might have climbed up just half way to the top, if I had held out a little more," may be taken as showing the fact, that the special grasp of children in this period is moved by the emotional side and they are unable to measure objectively. But on the other hand in spite of such a state of the children part of them resemble those of case (3): the narrow limited life circle of home and neighbourhood is extended gradually at the opportunity of schoolentering, till they stroll about to friends' houses, or moved by adventurous enjoyment, they go out on foot or riding a bicycle, which they have eagerly learned, to some unknown world.

And what is more a group, though fragile, starts in their world, which had been sporadical and independent and had no positive and close connection: 5 friends, Honda, Suto, Tanaka, and Inamura are conscious of an antagonist Saito and it is not without aim that such an intensive and systematic action, as to pray for their friends fathers success in war.

But it is more remarkable, that even their life, which is full of contradiction and chaos, reflects in such a manner the situational circumstances and shows so national an attitude, that the observer was struck to the heart.

We must admit the fact that the educational attitude towards children of this period of life was carried out in the past without regard at all to the undifferentiated mentality of children, as the above-mentioned examples showed enough. (Actually the word Rensei 錬成 — training and rearing — is easily to be mistaken to-day as rigorism.) On the other hand the standpoint, which sets value on the mentality of the child, so to say the reaction of the former standpoint, makes the child only live peacefully and lets him alone only in the world of his boy nature and easily disregard the connection between the adult and the child, and the effort, we feel, to clear up the condition of the child was too limited to his natural form and they failed to look upon

from the standpoint of value.

(Translated by K. Kato and M. Kuroda.)

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